

Message Text

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INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 NSC-05 PM-03 L-02 CIAE-00 DODE-00

INR-07 NSAE-00 PA-01 RSC-01 USIA-06 PRS-01 SP-02

SAJ-01 ACDA-05 EB-07 /054 W
----- 122014

R 101723Z JAN 75

FM AMEMBASSY BONN

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7192

INFO AMEMBASSY BERLIN

USMISSION USBERLIN

AMCONSUL BREMEN

AMCONSUL DUSSELDORF

AMCONSUL FRANKFURT

AMCONSUL HAMBURG

AMCONSUL MUNICH

AMCONSUL STUTTGART

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, GW

SUBJECT: FDP "PROFILE" BUILDING PROVES DIFFICULT

REF: (A) STUTTGART 0008; (B) BONN 0302

SUMMARY: THE DIFFICULTIES SECRETARY GENERAL BANGEMANN
FACED AT THE FDP THREE KINGS' DAY MEETING IN STUTTGART
AS WELL AS THE CLOSING SPEECH BY PARTY LEADER GENSCHER
AND BANGEMENN'S STATEMENT ON CODETERMINATION ARE IN-
DICATIVE OF THE PROBLEMS FACED BY THE FDP AS THE 1975
ELECTION YEAR BEGINS.

THERE IS CONSIDERABLE THRESHING ABOUT AND DIFFERENCES
EXIST IN THE PARTY LEADERSHIP ON THE BEST MEANS OF
ESTABLISHING A SEPARATE PROFILE WHICH WILL APPEAL TO
THE VOTERS WITHOUT IRREPARABLY DAMAGING RELATIONS WITH
THE SPD. THE POSSIBILITY OF AN EVENTUAL BONN COALITION

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OF THE FDP WITH THE CDU WHILE STILL REMOTE IS DISCUSSED

MORE SERIOUSLY THAN IT HAS BEEN FOR SOME YEARS. END
SUMMARY.

1. RECENT POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS WHICH BEGAN WITH THE MEETING OF THE BADEN/WUERTTEMBERG FDP ON THREE KINGS' DAY WEEKEND, SERVE TO ILLUMINATE THE DIFFICULTIES OF THE FDP AS THE CRITICAL 1975 ELECTION YEAR BEGINS. AT THE TRADITIONAL MEETING, THE FDP'S PROPENSITY FOR INTERNAL STRIFE WAS CLEARLY IN EVIDENCE. NATIONAL SECRETARY GENERAL AND BADEN-WUERTTEMBERG CHAIRMAN BANGEMANN FACED SERIOUS CRITICISM WITHIN HIS LAND ORGANIZATION AND ONE OF HIS MOST VOCAL CRITICS WAS RE-ELECTED OVER BANGEMANN'S OPPOSITION. IN ADDITION, THE RESOLUTION CONCERNING INDUSTRIAL CODETERMINATION (MITBESTIMMUNG), CLEARLY IDENTIFIED WITH BANGEMANN PASSED BY ONLY A ONE-VOTE MARGIN.

2. MORE IMPORTANT FOR THE NATIONAL SCENE, HOWEVER, WAS THE SPEECH (REFTELS) DELIVERED BY FDP LEADER GENSCHER WHICH HAS CAUSED MARKED REVERBERATIONS. GENSCHER GAVE A HARD HITTING SPEECH WHICH ATTEMPTED TO SQUARE THE CIRCLE (I.E., TO TAKE ISSUE WITH THE SPD IN ORDER TO CREATE A CLEARLY IDENTIFIABLE FDP PROFILE WITHOUT DOING IRREPARABLE HARM TO THE ALREADY FRAGILE RELATIONS IN THE BONN COALITION).

3. THE CONSIDERABLE AMOUNT OF THRESHING ABOUT ON THE PART OF THE FDP IS EXACERBATED BY THE FEAR THAT THE PARTY MIGHT FALL BELOW THE FIVE PERCENT HURDLE IN SOME OF THE LAENDER. THE FDP'S DISAPPOINTING PERFORMANCE IN HESSE AND BAVARIA HAS HAD A TRAUMATIC EFFECT UPON THE PARTY AND HAS CREATED EVEN MORE DISARRAY WITHIN THE LIBERAL RANKS THAN USUAL. BANGEMANN TOLD AN EMBASSY OFFICER FOLLOWING THE MEETING THAT IT WAS NECESSARY FOR THE LIBERALS TO TAKE CLEAR POSITIONS IN ORDER TO APPEAL TO THE SOLID FIVE TO SEVEN PERCENT OF THE POPULATION THAT LOYALLY VOTES FDP. HE DEFENDED HIS THROWING DOWN OF THE GAUNTLET ON MITBESTIMMUNG (HIS STATEMENT THAT A DIRECT VOTING PROCEDURE MUST BE INCLUDED IN THE COMPROMISE BILL) AS A NECESSARY COM-

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PONENT OF FDP PROFILE BUILDING.

4. OBVIOUSLY STUNG BY CRITICISM THAT HE HAD FORCED THE SPD INTO A DIRECT CONFRONTATION AND THAT HE WAS INDIRECTLY CRITICIZING THE PARTY LEADERSHIP (SCHEEL, GENSCHER, MAIHOFFER AND MISCHNICK), WHO HAD AGREED TO THE ORIGINAL COMPROMISE, BANGEMANN CLAIMED THAT THE SPD HAD AGREED BACK IN APRIL THAT THE COMPROMISE

PACKAGE WAS STILL OPEN TO DISCUSSION. HE CITED LABOR MINISTER ARENDT'S COMMENTS TO THE BUNDESRAT WHEN THE DRAFT BILL WAS PRESENTED ON APRIL 5, 1974, AND A BRANDT SPEECH OF APRIL 9. AT ANOTHER MEETING, HOWEVER,

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SAJ-01 ACDA-05 EB-07 /054 W

----- 122050

R 101723Z JAN 75

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NATIONAL FDP BUSINESS MANAGER HOFMANN TOLD AN EMBASSY OFFICER THAT HE THOUGHT BANGEMANN, BY TAKING A "MAXIMUM" POSITION, HAD PROBABLY DAMAGED RELATIONS WITHIN THE BONN COALITION AND HAD FED UNREALISTIC EXPECTATIONS AMONG FDP MEMBERS ABOUT CHANGES THAT WOULD BE ACCEPTABLE TO THE SPD.

5. WHILE ONLY A FEW YEARS AGO THE THOUGHT OF AN FDP/CDU COALITION WAS ANATHEMA TO THE FDP, SUCH TALK

HAS BECOME MORE COMMON SINCE THE ELECTIONS IN HESSE AND BAVARIA. HOFMANN BELIEVES THAT SHOULD THE FDP FAIL TO OBTAIN FIVE PERCENT IN NORTH RHINE-WESTPHALIA IT IS POSSIBLE THAT IT WOULD BE FORCED TO THINK ABOUT SUCH A COALITION IN ORDER TO SAVE THE PARTY IN THE 1976 BUNDESTAG ELECTIONS. HOFMANN SAID THAT SUCH LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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A SITUATION WOULD BE SIMILAR TO THAT IN 1969 WHEN SCHEEL, FACED WITH ELECTION SETBACKS, APPROACHED THE SPD. HOWEVER, BANGEMANN COMMENTED THAT A COALITION WAS MORE LIKELY WITH THE CDU IF THE FDP WERE SUCCESSFUL IN THE LAND ELECTIONS AND THEREFORE WOULD BE BARGAINING FROM A POSITION OF STRENGTH. THE EMBASSY OFFICER ASKED BANGEMANN IF A COALITION WITH THE CDU WOULD NOT CREATE A SERIOUS SPLIT WITHIN THE PARTY. BANGEMANN REPLIED THAT THE MINORITY MUST ACCEPT THE WILL OF THE MAJORITY OR GET OUT OF THE PARTY. IN 1969, HE SAID, THE RIGHT WING MINORITY WHO OPPOSED THE COALITION WITH THE SPD ACCEPTED THE WILL OF THE MAJORITY, AND SHOULD THE PARTY FIND IT NECESSARY TO GO INTO A COALITION WITH THE CDU IT WOULD BE THE LEFT WING'S DUTY AS LOYAL PARTY MEMBERS TO ACCEPT THE DECISION.

6. BOTH BANGEMANN AND HOFMANN STRESSED THAT THEY EXPECT THE FDP TO OVERCOME THE FIVE PERCENT HURDLE IN NORTH RHINE-WESTPHALIA AND FOR THE BONN COALITION TO REMAIN UNTIL THE 1976 ELECTIONS. BANGEMANN, IN LISTING THE FDP'S CHANCES FOR SUCCESS IN DESCENDING ORDER, SAID THAT THE PARTY HAD THE BEST CHANCES IN SCHLESWIG-HOLSTEIN WHERE HE BELIEVED IT MIGHT BE POSSIBLE FOR IT TO ONCE AGAIN RETURN TO THE LANDTAG, FOLLOWED BY RHINELAND-PALATINATE, BERLIN, NORTH RHINE-WESTPHALIA, AND SHOULD HAVE THE MOST DIFFICULTIES IN THE SAARLAND. HE DID NOT MENTION BREMEN.

7. AS A SMALL PARTY WHICH HAS BEEN DESCRIBED AS A PARTY OF "OUTSIDERS," THE FDP HAS RARELY PROJECTED AN IMAGE OF UNITY AND LIVELY DISAGREEMENT WITHIN THE PARTY IS A TRADITION. THE FDP, IT SHOULD ALSO BE NOTED, HAS FACED DARK TIMES IN THE PAST AND HAS SHOWN A TALENT FOR SURVIVAL. NEVERTHELESS, THE DISAGREEMENT BETWEEN BANGEMANN AND HOFMANN (THE LATTER IMPLIED THAT GENSCHER WAS LESS THAN HAPPY WITH HIS SECRETARY GENERAL'S PERFORMANCE IN STUTTGART) DEMONSTRATES THE FDP DILEMMA.

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: LABOR LAW, POLICIES, NEGOTIATIONS, CENTRAL LEGISLATURE
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 10 JAN 1975
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: MorefiRH
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1975BONN00468
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D750010-1035
From: BONN
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1975/newtext/t19750163/aaaacdkm.tel
Line Count: 228
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION EUR
Original Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 5
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 75 STUTTGART 0008, 75 BONN 0302
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: MorefiRH
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 27 MAY 2003
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <27 MAY 2003 by SmithRJ>; APPROVED <30 MAY 2003 by MorefiRH>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
05 JUL 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: FDP "PROFILE" BUILDING PROVES DIFFICULT
TAGS: PINT, GE
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 05 JUL 2006